

Twisted and Textured



Even before he learned to walk, John Lee was a constant presence in his father's woodshop, where he would stand for hours in a playpen and watch his father work. By age 3 or 4, he had projects of his own under way. Four decades on, working full time in a shop he built behind his father's house in County Meath, Ireland, Lee uses traditional techniques to create extremely innovative furniture. His chest of drawers in solid European white oak not only curves but also twists and tapers, requiring that each of its 20 hand-clovetailed limewood drawer boxes be joined at a different angle and fitted with a uniquely shaped

applied front. Inspired by driftwood and erosion, Lee textured the chest with routed coves that taper as they wind across the top, and with rough, routed striations on the face of the cabinet that are etched right across the dividers as well as the drawer fronts. To increase the appearance of natural weathering, he sandblasted the exterior of the piece. Still boyish in his enthusiasm for woodworking, Lee now walks his own path through the craft.

—Jonathan Blitzer



how they did it

Tradition with a twist

BY JONATHAN BINZEN

FRAMEWORK FITTED TO CURVY CASE

The carcass, made of white oak, is joined with biscuited miters.

TOP VIEW

Top of case

Bottom of case

In John Lee's chest of drawers (see the back cover), every rule of joinery and wood movement is carefully observed—even as traditional notions of design are cast aside. Lee joined the case with miters and fitted a framework of drawer dividers into it with sliding dovetails. The drawers have hand-dovetailed boxes and applied solid white-oak fronts that are individually shaped to fit the contours of the case. To see more of Lee's rule-bending work, go to johnlee.furniture.com.

The vertical dividers, dovetailed into the case, are cut on an angle to match the offset curves of the top and bottom of the case.

The snaking horizontal dividers are notched into the vertical dividers and dovetailed into the case sides.

FALSE DRAWERS HELP WITH SHAPING

Short "false" drawers support the drawer fronts for marking and texturing.

TOP VIEW

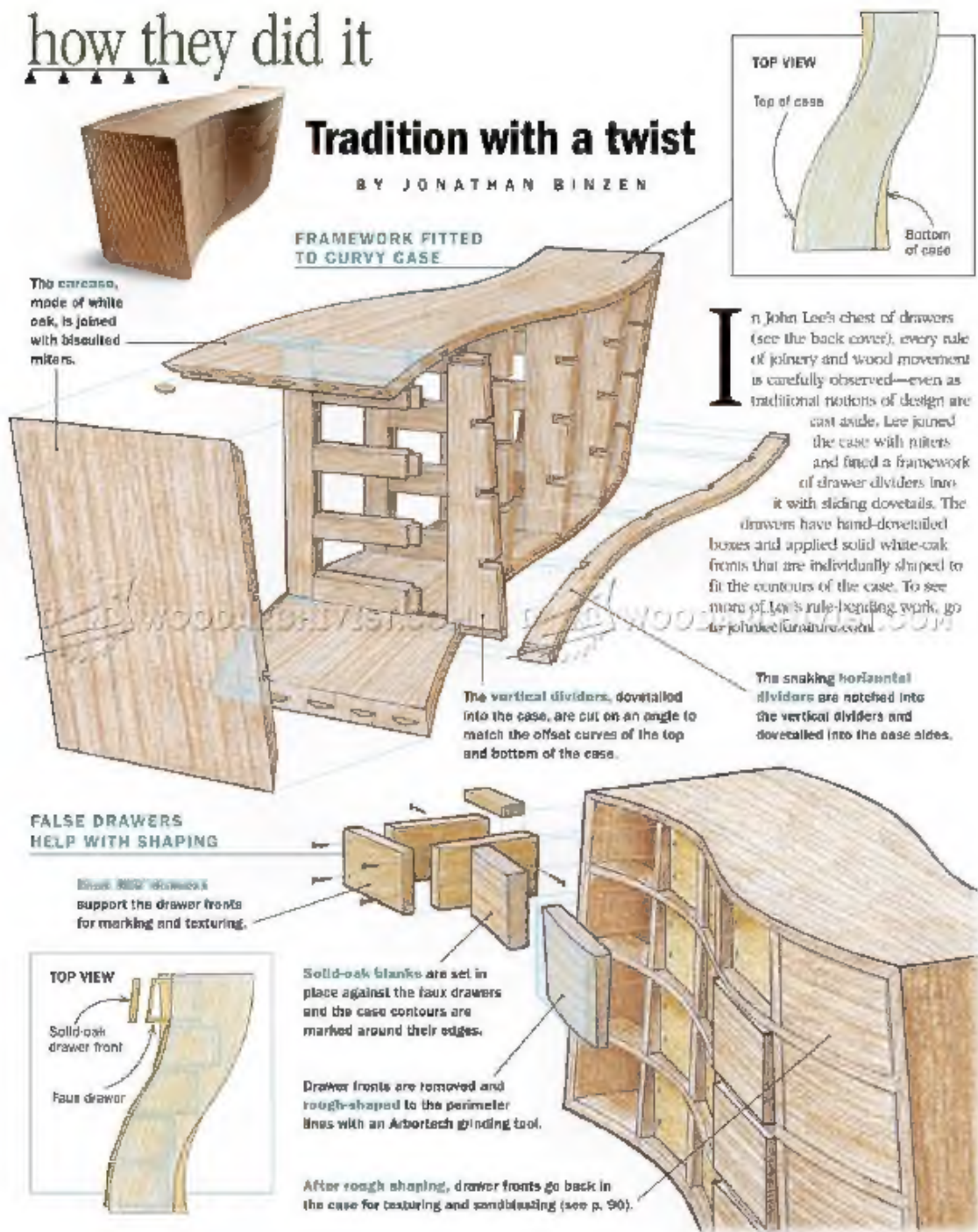
Solid-oak drawer front

Faux drawer

Solid-oak blanks are set in place against the faux drawers and the case contours are marked around their edges.

Drawer fronts are removed and rough-shaped to the perimeter lines with an Arbortech grinding tool.

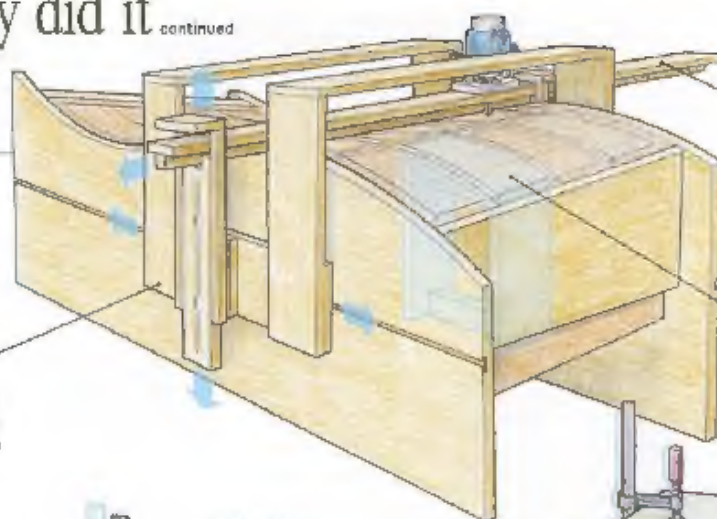
After rough shaping, drawer fronts go back in the case for texturing and sandblasting (see p. 90).



how they did it continued

BIG JIG FOR TEXTURING

Sliding trammel jig guides the router. Texturing is done using a core-box bit. The case is supported by wooden boxes on the floor.

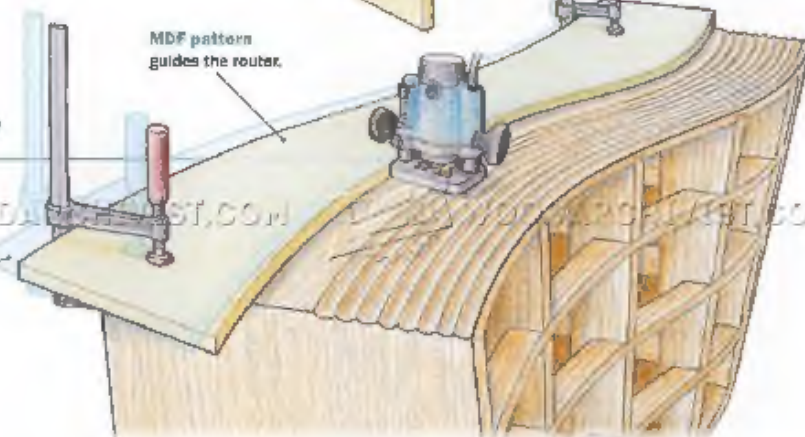


The horizontal beam slides back and forth and also travels up and down to follow the curved sides of the jig, which are cut to match the case curves.

For texturing and sandblasting, the drawer fronts are shimmed tightly in place and spot-glued to the faux drawers.

CURVED AND TAPERED COVES ON TOP

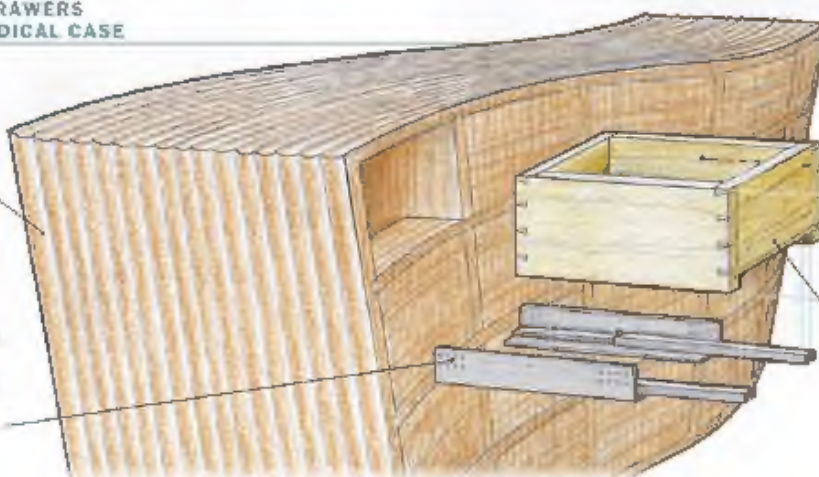
Because the carcass is wider at one end, the coves must taper, too. Each cove is cut in two passes, using a core-box bit. The pattern is rotated slightly for the second cut.



FITTING DRAWERS INTO A RADICAL CASE

The coves in the case sides are not tapered.

Commercial undermount drawer slides with push-fetch feature eliminate the need for pulls.



Solid-oak faces are screwed to drawer box.

Hand-hovetailed drawer boxes are angled in front to match curve of case.